DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 876 CG 013 664

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TITLE The Relevance of Anxiety and Assertiveness in Urban Field Studies.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 27p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anxiety; *Assertiveness; Behavior Patterns; College Students; Coping; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; *Individual Characteristics; *Interpersonal Competence; *Self Concept; Student Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *Adjective Checklist (Gough and Heilbrun)

ABSTRACT

The effects of participation in field study programs on levels of anxiety and assertiveness among college students was investigated. Students enrolled in the Great Lakes Colleges Association - Philadelphia Urban Semester, 1976-1977, were systematically assessed for levels of anxiety and related personality dimensions using the Adjective Check List on a periodic basis. The results of the analysis showed significantly higher levels of anxiety in the early stages of the program in contrast to students on-campus. Subsequent measures indicated significant increases in coping abilities and levels of self-confidence among students enrolled in the field study not reflected in the campus-based students. No significant relationships between ability to cope and levels of assertiveness were established, although the data suggests the utility of systematic assertiveness training as a means of enhancing coping abilities and reducing situational anxiety in an urban field study situation. (Author)

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THE RELEVANCE OF ANXIETY AND ASSERTIVENESS IN URBAN FIELD STUDIES

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There appears to be a widely held belief among administrators of off-campus, undergraduate programs that students who participate in field studies benefit from an enhanced personal and social efficacy, i.e., an increased capability to cope with stressful situations. Prior research into this aspect of urban field studies in Philadelphia tend to support this notion (Beinstein, 1974). Students enrolled in the Great Lakes Colleges Association, Philadelphia Urban Semester were systematically assessed using a modified version of the Adjective Check List (Gough and Heilbrun, 1965) and a self-report form in which a variety of coping situations were presented. The results from a study conducted during the Fall Semester 1974, with 48 students, Beinstein concluded, indicate that, "our students had indeed experienced change in self-concept and personal/social efficacy. All differences in scores, except Affiliation, were significant and in the expected direction. That is, after three months' participation in the Philadelphia Urban Semester students checked more adjectives as characteristic of themselves and increasingly checked those adjectives indicating greater Self-Confidence and Change Orientation and less Abasement. Their self-perceived comfort in the hypothetical situations increased as did their perceived ability to enact these situations." (Bernstein, 1974, pp.21-22).

The observations reported herein are based on a study undertaken in the Spring of 1976 in an attempt to isolate some of the factors associated with increasing social and personal efficacy

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within the context of an undergraduate Urban Field Study program, the Great Lakes Colleges Association - Philadelphia Urban Semester. Specifically, it attempted to systematically examine the relationship between anxiety and assertiveness for students in Philadelphia.

Asseertiveness is defined as "the ability to negotiate mutually satisfactory solutions to a variety of interpersonal problems;" that is to be personally and socially effective. Lack of assertiveness is frequently coupled with feelings of inadequacy.

> They (non-assertive persons) feel unhappy that they are unable to get along with others or even themselves. They often feel put down, stifled, upset and exploited. These feelings come to the surface in various forms: as loneliness, as depression, as a sense of helplessness, and perhaps most of all as shyness (Bower and Bower, 1976, p. 1).

These feelings are often coupled with feelings of anxiety, and other emotional and behavioral problems (cf. Zimbardo, Pilkonis and Norwood, 1975).

It was predicted that an increase in assertiveness would be reflected in a decrease in anxiety and increased feeling of satisfaction with one's own ability to cope with a variety of interpersonal problems. Measures of assertiveness and level of anxiety should, therefore, be indicative of an increase or decrease in personal and social efficacy, as well as corroborative of the effect of the program structure on level of anxiety and satisfaction with the program. In other words, an inverse relationship between level of anxiety and assertiveness was predicted. The data obtained during this study tended to support this prediction.

Methodology

The experimental group consisted of 31 students from nine colleges enrolled in the Great Lakes Colleges Association - Philadelphia Urban Semester, Spring 1976. A control group of 77 students was selected randomly from among students enrolled at the home campus, Spring 1976, who had not previously participated in the P.U.S.

Two dependent variables were examined:

(1) Anxiety level using the Spielberger (1970) State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) as a measure of Trait (inherent) and/or State (induced, situational) Anxiety levels.

(2) Assertiveness, using S. Rathus' (1974) 30-item Assertiveness Scale.

The control variables in examining the data were:

(1) Sex of student

(2) College

(3) Year of graduation

(4) GLCA/PUS Field Supervisor and Seminar Section

Nineteen students enrolled in the Philadelphia Urban Semester completed the pre- and post-program testing. Seventy-seven responses were received from students enrolled at the home campus during the same period.

Assumptions

A priori, several working hypotheses had been considered for examination. They were:

(1) There is a difference in inherent Trait Anxiety level between students who come to Philadelphia for field study and those who remain on their home campus.

(2) State Anxiety, which is related to situational factors, is higher among field study students than home campus students at the start of the program but lower at the end of the semester.

(3) There is a difference in level of assertiveness between students who come to Philadelphia and those who remain on their home campus (i.e. students who elect to enroll in an off-campus urban field study program are likely to be more assertive than their peers who choose to remain on campus).

(4) Level of assertiveness will increase more rapidly in the P.U.S. than among home campus students.

(5) Level of assertiveness and level of anxiety are inversely correlated (we considered both trait and state anxiety levels, although only the latter might reasonably be expected to change based on the construct definitions).

(6) Reported satisfaction with the P.U.S. field study program would be inversely correlated with State Anxiety level and positively correlated to level of assertiveness.

The pre-arrival data were collected in January 1976 by a mail survey of students enrolled in the Philadelphia Urban Semester for [illegible]ng Semester 1976. Data were collected from the same s[illegible]pon arrival in Philadelphia by questionnaire administere[illegible]local staff members in scheduled group meetings. Data were collected on home campuses with the assistance of GLCA

faculty liaison persons who were asked to randomly select students on campus to whom then the same questionnaires were administered.

The Results

I. In order to test our first prediction, the null hypothesis "there is no significant difference in the average level of trait anxiety between students in the experimental group and those in the control group" was tested for each of the depen-dent variable groups. The results are tabulated below.

(INSERT TABLE I)

As indicated in Table I, the prediction of a difference in trail anxiety level between students remaining on-campus and those enrolling in the P.U.S. was not confirmed. There is nothing in our data to suggest that the students, as a group, who came to Philadelphia in the Spring Semester 1976 are higher, or lower, in latent, or inherent anxiety levels. Thus, we would anticipate that if significant difference in State Anxiety appears between the two groups, that it would be attributable to situational factors, i.e. one group in their first week of field studies versus the other group enrolled in a traditional on-campus pro-gram. We also examined Trait Anxiety, when the students were sub-grouped by the several independent variables.

Two observations seem clear based on the data when cross-tabulated by the independent variables:

(1) As a measure of inherent anxiety level, the test used (STAI-Trait) shows considerable stability over the sixteen week program.

(2) There are no significant differences observed in students' Trait Anxiety level when grouped by sex, college, year of graduation, or Philadelphia staff seminar leader, as shown in Table II.

(INSERT TABLE II)

In the former instance, this suggests that there is no screening process on campuses which results in the referral of more, or less, innately anxious students to Philadelphia, (i.e. there is uniformity in the screening process with respect to the degree it considers, or ignores, latent anxiety levels as a screening factor in deciding whether or not students should be permitted to study off-campus).

II. The second prediction, as noted previously, has to do with our perception that the GLCA/PUS seems to induce a high level of state (situational) anxiety in students, particularly during the initial weeks of the program. Our hypothesis for testing was, therefore, that "there is no significant difference in mean State Anxiety between the experimental and control groups."

(INSERT TABLE III)

As can be seen from Table III, our prediction was not confirmed initially. We saw no significant difference between the two groups when comparing levels of state anxiety prior to arrival in Philadelphia. This was consistent with our previously observed data on Trait Anxiety (i.e. two groups with similar trait characteristics could be expected to show a similar State Anxiety response under the same situational conditions).

However, upon testing during the first week after arrival the State Anxiety levels of the Philadelphia group showed a marked increase from an average of 35.99 to 41.79. This pattern of State Anxiety levels was consistent with our expectations for shifts in State Anxiety between the pre-arrival and 1st week test. Thereafter, a gradual decline in State Anxiety was observed.

The only difference in level of State Anxiety among members of the Philadelphia group which was significant ($t=2.47$) was that associated with sex. The women were consistently higher in measured level of State Anxiety and did not show the decline in level over time evidenced by the men. The urban environment seems to be perceived as more threatening by women students.

Figure I illustrates student anxiety levels over the duration of the semester.

(INSERT FIGURE I)

The pattern of declining anxiety level over time is evident from Figure I. The small rise in State Anxiety in the last week of the program is coincident with the final examinations.

III. Our prediction concerning the inherent differences in level of assertiveness between students in the Philadelphia and on-campus groups was tested using the hypothesis that "there is no significant difference in level of assertiveness between the two groups as measured by the Rathus Thirty-Item Assertiveness Scale." The results are shown in Table IV.

(INSERT TABLE IV)

Thus, the prediction is confirmed and our conclusion must be that there are no significant differences in assertiveness between the students who come to Philadelphia and those who do not. This at first appears anti-intuitive (i.e. one would expect students who go off campus to exercise more initiative). However, the Philadelphia staff has noticed recently that a large number of applicants while preparing their learning objectives for the Semester cite a desire to "learn how to be more assertive." This suggests that GLCA/PUS students may not be more assertive than their campus peers, but possibly more aware of a need to become more assertive.

IV. In order to evaluate our fourth prediction, it is necessary to look at the longitudinal data on assertiveness as shown in Figure II.

(INSERT FIGURE II)

The increase in level of assertiveness is evident in Figure II. This pattern is again consistent with our perception of students in the Philadelphia Urban Semester. The first five to seven weeks are spent in acclimatization, followed by a pronounced increase in self-confidence and coping abilities.

One of the few surprises in the data is that the women students tested consistently higher in assertiveness that the men as seen in Table V. This is contrary to the data on anxiety (i.e. women are higher in both anxiety level and assertiveness). There are no significant differences attributable to college, year of graduation or seminar.

V. Our prediction concerning possible inverse correlation between level of assertiveness and level of anxiety is important for two reasons. The first is that if we accept the premise that high levels of anxiety are inhibiting to learning (c.f. Spielberger, 1966) and we know from our data that students arriving in Philadelphia show a high level of State Anxiety, it is important to find methods of reducing State Anxiety to increase learning potentials. Assertive behavior can be learned and has been shown elsewhere to result in a concomitant reduction in anxiety symptoms (Hedquist and Weinhold, 1970; Ruff and Korchin, 1962; Smith, 1975). Thus, if assertiveness can be increased through systematic training, and if assertiveness and State Anxiety are inversely correlated, one could reasonably conclude that the GLCA Philadelphia Urban Semester should include systematic assertiveness training as an initial element in its program design.

The second aspect of this prediction is its relevance to assessing the program goal of increasing personal and social efficacy. Level of assertiveness has been discussed as an indicator of more effective personal behavior; increasing levels of anxiety have been shown to accompany social dysfunction. Therefore, one can conclude that increasing levels of assertiveness accompanied by a decreasing level of anxiety would be a pattern typical of an individual whose personal and social efficacy in coping with situational problems was also increasing.

The results of our correlation analysis are shown in Table VI.

(INSERT TABLE VI)

The relationship between State Anxiety (A_s) and Assertiveness (A_{sr}) is in the predicted direction, as indicated by the negative values for r, although the relationship is not strong. Indeed, it appears that Trait Anxiety (A_t) and Assertiveness are more highly correlated in these naive subjects. Trait Anxiety is considered to be a relatively stable personality characteristic while Assertiveness is currently considered to be relatively plastic (i.e. subject to increase through a learning theory based approach). An area of possible interest for further investigation would be, "is assertiveness independent of Trait Anxiety?"

VI. Our final prediction was that there exists an inverse relationship between State Anxiety (A_s) and Level of Satisfaction (S) with the two primary parts of the Philadelphia program - City Seminar (S_{cs}) and Work Placement (S_{wp}). Our interest in this relationship is in attempting to isolate the effects of stress (anxiety) on students' perception of the program, as reflected in their reported levels of satisfaction. In order to do this we examined the relationships between anxiety and self-reports of satisfaction.

Satisfaction was measured using a Likert-type scale beginning with the third test administration in the sixth week. The general pattern shows increasing satisfaction with the City Seminar. Level of satisfaction is independent of sex, college, year of graduation or seminar leader. The mean for average level of reported satisfaction with the seminar increased from 6.29 to 7.18 over a ten week span.

Although the differences are not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that more women consistently rated City Seminar Satisfaction (S_{cs}) higher than men and juniors consistently higher than seniors at each test administration.

Again, there are no significant differences in level of satisfaction with the Work Placement related to sex, college, year of graduation, or field supervisor. Overall, a pattern of increasing level of satisfaction (S_{wp}) over time was shown; the reported level of Satisfaction was higher, but absolute increase is less than that shown for Satisfaction in City Seminar.

In Table VII, the average satisfaction levels for Work Placement and City Seminar are shown. Both increase over time, with satisfaction in City Seminar increasing more rapidly than that for work placement, but never exceeding it.

(INSERT TABLE VII)

No clear patterns between levels of anxiety and satisfaction were evident nor was there any pattern with respect to assertiveness and satisfaction. Although significance is low, after the sixth week there was a consistent negative correlation between Satisfaction with City Seminar and Satisfaction with the Work Placement. This result tends to confirm opinions of the current program staff based on informal observation of students' response to the program formed over the last three years.

Conclusions

(1) All of the results were in the predicted directions. Assertiveness increased and anxiety declined over the semester; However, the correlation between assertiveness and anxiety is so

low that we cannot conclude that increased social and personal efficacy, as evidenced by assertiveness, is associated with anxiety reduction.

(2) It does appear that social and personal efficacy are increased through field experience. It was not clear what specific factors within the GLCA/PUS program design specifically contribute to this increase, when students are considered as a group. However, a subsequent modification in program design for the first two weeks of the program intended to provide practice in the use of systematic assertive skills and to ease the problem of housing did appear to contribute to reduction of State Anxiety of students in the fall of 1977 over that observed in the Fall of 1976.

(3) Our perception that students are primarily concerned with the Work Placement is supported; however, the disparity in satisfaction levels between the Cith Seminar and the Work placement is not as great as we had anticipated based on prior anecdotal information. In general, the overall level of program satisfaction was high.

(4) There appear to be no differences in the measured variables attributable to the home campus selection and screening processes. Not only do the students in Philadelphia not differ from those on the home campuses, but show no significant difference between schools represented in Philadelphia.

(5) The only reliable differences in anxiety level and assertiveness which emerged consistently were those created to sex of respondents. Males consistently showed lower anxiety, lower assertiveness, and higher satisfaction with the practical field study elements of the program than did the women.

(6) With respect to our several predictions we conclude:

a. Students coming to Philadelphia are not inherently more anxious than students remaining on campus.

b. State Anxiety is higher among Philadelphia students during the early part of the program as compared to students on the home campus.

c. There is no difference in assertiveness between students in Philadelphia and those on the home campus at the start of the program.

d. Level of assertiveness did increase more rapidly in Philadelphia than on home campuses; however, the amount of the increase was not significantly greater.

e. There is no apparent relationship between assertiveness and state anxiety. Trait anxiety and assertiveness appear inversely related; however, the measured relationship is weak.

f. State anxiety does not appear to be a factor in satisfaction with the academic City Seminar but it does appear to be negatively related to practical work placement satisfaction.

Implications for Urban Field Study Program Design

All of the relationships observed were so weak statistically that there is little one can conclude with much confidence. However, the direction of the observed shifts tended to support our prediction based on experience with students over the prior eight years. While levels of assertiveness does increase, we could not demonstrate statistically that it is attributable to specific aspects of program design.

The observed inverse relationship between assertiveness and work place satisfaction and the importance of the work placement relative to other activities suggests that a program design which includes a field placement or practicum as a major component could be strengthened by including a component specifically designed to increase interpersonal coping skills in the work placement, such as systematic assertiveness training.

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TABLE I

COMPARATIVE LEVEL OF TRAIT ANXIETY (A_t)
between Philadelphia & on-campus groups

	n	M_{At}	S.D.	t
Philadelphia	19	39.00	11.26	0.1038
On-campus	77	38.48	7.56	

TABLE II

Pre- and Post Program Trait Anxiety (A_t) Levels by Sex, Year of Graduation, and GLCA Seminar Leader

	N_i	PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
		M	S.D.	F	M	S.D.	F
Male	7	35.28	6.87	1.26	29.4	2.96	2.47
Female	12	41.36	13.09		37.5	11.13	
Senior	5	33.2	2.17		30.2	3.35	
Junior	12	41.42	13.14	0.9	37.1	11.38	1.70 (1)
Sophomore	1	39.0	-	-	-	-	
Seminar Leader							
"A"	6	36.66	6.02		35.0	7.70	
"B"	4	34.75	10.99	0.59	36.66	4.93	0.20
"C"	5	41.80	16.48		36.60	14.94	
"D"	3	44.66	11.98		35.66	9.50	

Note: (1) This value not included in the calculation of F for significance.

TABLE III

COMPARATIVE LEVEL OF STATE ANXIETY (A_S)
between Philadelphia & On-campus Groups

	n	MA_S	S.D.	t
Philadelphia	19	35.99	8.94	0.136
On-campus	77	36.31	7.38	

TABLE IV

COMPARATIVE LEVEL OF ASSERTIVENESS (A_{sr})
between Philadelphia & On-campus Cr

	n_i	M	S.D.	t
Philadelphia	19	+11.52	17.79	0.048
On-campus	77	+10.21	20.39	
Test norm		0	20.0	

TABLE V

LONGITUDINAL DATA ON LEVEL OF ASSERTIVENESS (A_{sr}) BY SEX

	ni	pre-arrival		week 1		week 6		week 11		week 16	
		mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.
Female	12	14.66	20.03	14.50	18.07	13.90	20.05	18.4	27.84	21.3	20.20
Male	7	6.14	12.67	7.71	18.85	7.75	16.76	7.75	23.93	13.4	19.63

TABLE VI

CORRELATION (r), SIGNIFICANCE AND STANDARD ERROR OF ESTIMATE
ANXIETY LEVELS AND LEVEL OF ASSERTIVENESS

	PRE-ARRIVAL			1ST WEEK			6TH WEEK			11TH WEEK			16TH WEEK		
	r	Sig	SE	r	Sig	SE	r	Sig	SE	r	Sig	SE	r	Sig	SE
t v A_{sr}:															
iladelphia	-0.40	0.048	10.62	-0.51	0.01	8.35	0.27	0.13	8.00	-0.43	0.12	11.89	-0.15	0.28	10.14
-campus	-0.38	0.0003	6.92												
; v A_{sr}:															
iladelphia	-0.12	0.312	9.84	-0.43	0.03	9.92	-0.43	.04	7.52	-0.10	0.39	5.89	-0.04	0.43	13.11
-campus	-0.13	0.128	8.92												

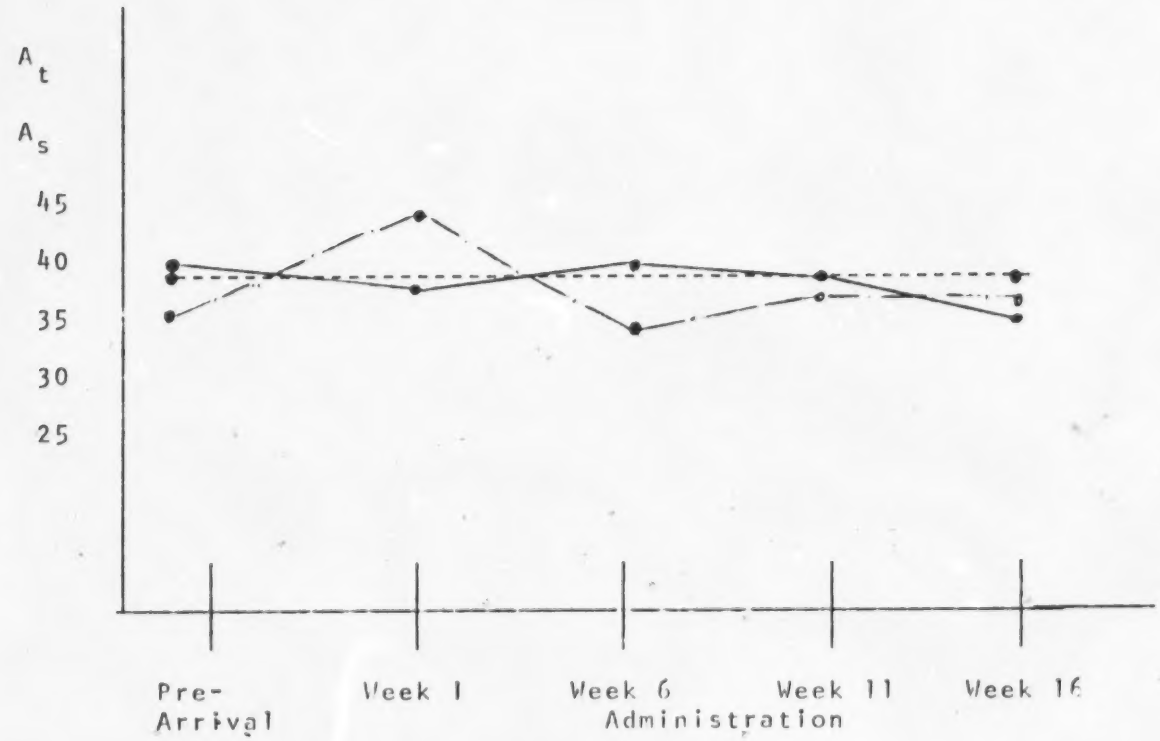
TABLE VII

AVERAGE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH
CITY SEMINAR AND WORK PLACEMENT
REPORTED BY
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE P.U.S. SPRING 1976

	6th Week	11th Week	16th Week
Work Placement (S_{wp})	7.49	7.46	7.78
City Seminar (S_{cs})	6.29	6.83	7.18
S_{wp} v. S_{cs}: t=	0.64	0.49	0.33

FIGURE I

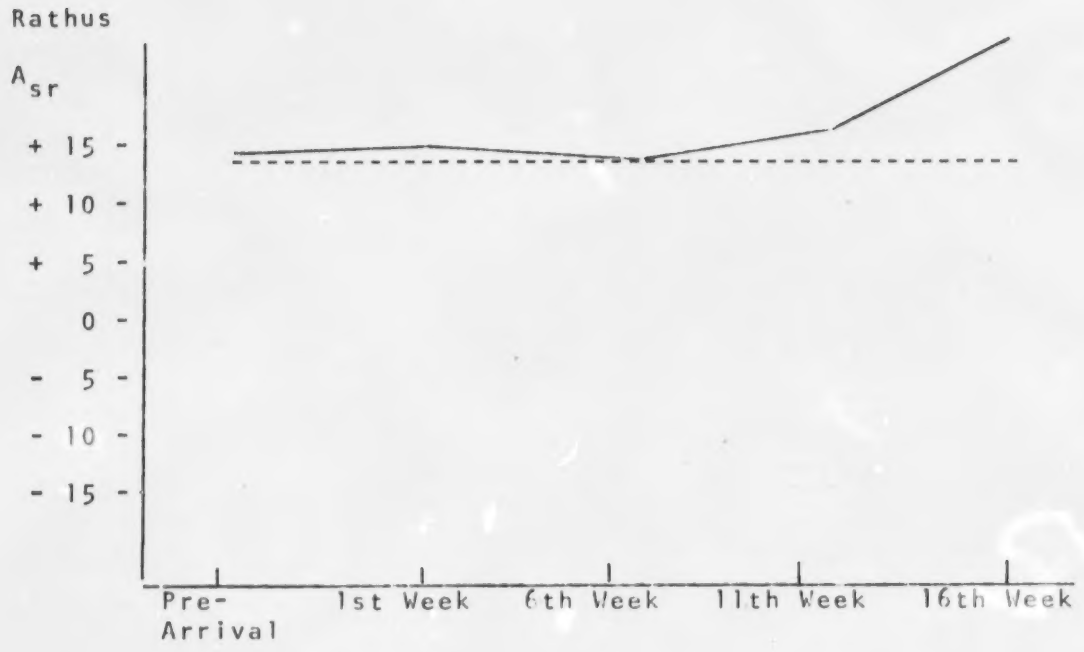
STUDENT ANXIETY LEVELS, SPRING SEMESTER 1976



KEY: Philadelphia Group Average Level of Anxiety (A_t) _____
Philadelphia Group Average Level of State Anxiety (A_s) _·_·_·_·_·
On-campus Average State Anxiety (A_s) -------
(Measured in week 1 and week 16 only)

FIGURE 11

ASSERTIVENESS LEVELS, SPRING SEMESTER 1976



Level of Assertiveness: Philadelphia _____
On-campus ---------